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SIPDIS

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TAGS: CMGT PREL CVIS EAIR CVIS

SUBJECT: COLLECTING VWP FINGERPRINTS IN IRELAND

REF: STATE 3517

1. Despite Ireland's relatively small population, long-standing ties to the U.S. and ease of travel make Ireland one of the top ten beneficiaries of the Visa Waiver Program. Because of this, any modification in the program would be followed closely both by the Irish government and by the general public. Post's responses are keyed to reftel:

**I.A.** I. There are two major international airports in Ireland (Dublin and Shannon) and both of these airports currently house a dedicated area for U.S. immigration pre-inspection facilities, which are staffed by USCBP personnel. While not all flights are pre-cleared, the majority is, and presumably it would be most efficient to have the fingerprinting function remain with USCBP in those cases. In the case of those flights that are not pre-cleared, arrangements would have to be made to dedicate a portion of the space available for a stand-alone type of operation, although this could be problematic during times when post-clearance of flights is due to a delay in processing.

II. While the number fluctuates according to the season, there are an average of 15 flights daily that leave either Dublin or Shannon for the U.S.

III. Cons Chief spoke with Ray Bassett, Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs at the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs on January 13th, and according to A/S Bassett, the agreements in place that allow USCBP to fingerprint travelers set the precedent for such procedures. If the ten-prints were gathered in the same or similar context, he did not foresee any problems.

IV. If ten-prints were gathered as a normal part of USCBP operations, additional space would not be necessary, although the delays due to the longer period of time necessary for fingerprint collection might result in more flights being forced to post-clear. If "after-hours" flights needed this service, presumably the USCBP space could be used for those flights as well, if additional staffing is provided. There would be space concerns, however, for those flights that are post-cleared during the workday due to the lack of space available to process them. This is especially the case in Dublin where occasional logjams necessitate post-clearance of a particular flight. In those cases, there would be no possibility of giving access to ten-print services. While the airport in Dublin is currently undergoing an expansion, present space concerns and traffic routing would not suggest a logical place, other than USCBP facilities to place a fingerprint collection point.

**V.** If fingerprinting were done through Dublin and Shannon USCBP facilities, then fingerprinting capability could be quickly established, subject to the caveats outlined in Paragraph IV. If it were decided that USCBP would do all ten-print collection in Ireland, then there may be the need for additional USCBP personnel.

VI. There would be no additional rental costs if USCBP space were used, but there could be additional costs if it were decided to expand the USCBP Dublin-Shannon operation.

VII. Host government raised no objection in principle to the expansion of our fingerprinting operation. See Paragraph III.

VIII. If USCBP facilities were used for the collection of fingerprints, the feasibility is high, subject to additional staffing for peak periods and "after-hours" collection.

**I.B.** I. Post currently is in the process of expanding waiting room facilities to accommodate current workflow. Once that is accomplished, we are confident that we will be able to manage our visa workload for the foreseeable future, assuming the VWP remains in place for Ireland. However, we are not in a position to provide a place for enrollment for VWP travelers at post, absent buying or leasing new property in Dublin for that purpose, a

very expensive proposition in what is one of Europe's most expensive housing markets (it should be noted that in the years immediately preceding Ireland's accession to the VWP, the Consular Section here was in fact located in a separate building).

II. This is difficult to assess, as it would depend largely on the press coverage given the program and traveler's overall evaluation of the benefits associated with enrollment. Since most of the population of Ireland lives outside of Dublin, there would be significant costs associated with coming to the Embassy in order to enroll - in short, very similar to applying for a visa without any of the benefits.

III. In that the Embassy does not currently have the space to process a meaningful number of VWP enrollees, additional space would be required. As nearly 360,000 alien passengers traveled from Ireland to the U.S. via Dublin and Shannon airports in calendar year 2005, the vast majority of whom were VWP participants, it can be assumed that this would be the number we would need to plan for in considering possible spaces for enrollment, especially since tourism to America from Ireland is on the rise (many Irish choose to fly from ports of entry outside of the Republic of Ireland, so if the number of flights to the U.S. from Ireland increases, we can anticipate significant growth in these numbers). Post was able to accommodate some 19,000 NIV applicants in calendar year 2005 with a waiting area of 82 square feet. If we round the numbers up to allow for space necessary to install the appropriate security checks, we would need to find an office space of at least 2000 square feet, and that does not take into consideration any space for offices or other equipment. At current rates, that would cost the U.S. government approximately \$100,000 per year (if a 25-30 year lease is signed), excluding costs for one American and one Foreign Service National employee. Alternately, post could run an appointment system, similar to that used for visa applicants, but this would negatively impact both VWP travelers and visa applicants alike by generating a backlog that would negate the positive effects of VWP travel. This in turn would probably have a negative impact on travel to the U.S. from Ireland, reducing not only the number of tourists, but also the amount of investment in the U.S. by Irish companies (and vice versa), as business executives would find it more difficult to travel on short notice.

IV. The host government would likely react very negatively to such a proposal. Post did raise this question with host government interlocutors, but they provided no response, as they considered it too absurd to be within the realm of the possible, especially given the existence of USCBP pre-inspection facilities at Dublin and Shannon airports.

V. The overall estimate of the feasibility of VWP fingerprint collection at post would therefore be low to zero.

C. Responses to the questions in section C of ref tel would be identical to those in section B, since an additional facility would be necessary should there be a mandate to collect VWP fingerprints at post.

D. Provided that ten-print enrollment was performed as part of the USCBP pre-inspection procedure, host government would not consider that to be a de facto termination of the VWP and would be unlikely to reciprocate and impose any additional requirements on the one million or more Americans who visit Ireland each year.

12. This cable was cleared by USCBP Port Director Dublin.

KENNY